MORT SAYS HE WROTE THIS BUT WE CAN'T PROVE IT!

by Mort (or so we are lead to believe)

Proof. What is it about proof that sends people into such a frenzy? Their constant search for it, and the consequences when it is obtained to their satisfaction never cease to amaze. proof cannot be had...allow me to demonstrate.

In recent issues of 'Animals & Men' much has been made of the unreliability of eye-witness evidence. Why? Surely this is a case of stating the obvious. Why stop at eyewitness evidence? Surely almost all evidence is unreliable.

If I was to state that I had seen our esteemed editor on TV you either believe me or you don't. I could produce a photograph of the screen, but lets face it, it could be an elaborate hoax. I could go the whole hog and provide you with a video of the programme together with a video of me watching it, but the cynics amongst you could, no doubt, provide a fiendishly complicated explanation as to how I could have faked it.

What the whole thing boils down to is this. The only person who knows whether I saw Jon on the TV is me. As it happens I did (nice hat Jon). Obviously all the above applies to unknown animals.

Having dealt with the witness side of it - bring on a corpse! If a corpse was found, what has actually been proved? Say, for example, the body of a marine elephant was washed up on the shores of Loch Ness. The papers would all go mad with the story and the identity of the Loch Ness Monster would have been proved for them, and for the vast majority of their readers .... but has it? All that has been proved, if we are to accept that nobody fabricated the elephants adaptations and then dumped it, is that a marine elephant died in Loch Ness.

Reading this back, it makes me sound like a Fortean. I'm not. When it comes to my area of cryptozoology, (lake monsters, sea serpents and dinosaur survivals), I'm a believer. what I'm trying to say is that we shouldn't become tied down by trying to accomplish the impossible. Unless, in the case of Loch Ness, for example, we can follow every single 'monster' with a camera and eyewitnesses, twenty-four hours a day for some time, nothing is proved.

None of the above is saying that you shouldn't filter evidence. I, for example, don't regard any of Frank Searles' photographs as useful, but I can't prove that they don't show the Loch Ness Monster. The only person who knows for certain is Frank!

In the end, however, it basically comes down to belief. You either do or you don't. Life is a lot more interesting WITH these creatures around, so stop trying to prove it and have a little faith!

Cryptocetology: The Page 254 Story.

Part Two in a series of articles on Mystery Whales by Darren Naish.

(Having given a general introduction to cryptocetology in a previous issue of Animals & Men [1], I here concentrate on a single event. It could serve as a case study giving a wider view of diversity among the Cetacea while also demonstrating their prominence in modern cryptozoology, hopefully expanding the notions I propounded in my first article. certainly, there can be no turning back.....)

This is the story of Scott's mystery dolphin: an animal I found in a book. Before going on any further, I must introduce the man to whom we owe this mystery. Sir Peter Scott.

Sir Peter was born in 1909, the son of the famed Antarctic explorer, and early on developed an interest in natural history [2]. Fortunately gifted with an artistic ability, he became increasingly skilled at painting and drawing animal subjects. By 1933 he was exhibiting his work. Scott's passion was birds and, judging from his paintings and later conservation work, waterfowl were especially close to his heart. Scott was, however, a student of all Nature and in the course of his life became closely involved with probably every group of living organisms. In 1946, after war-time service, he founded the Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (then just the Wildfowl Trust), and later expanded it to incorporate six centres in England and one in Scotland. Scott's conservation work is also marked by his role as co-founder of the Worldwide Fund for Nature (then the World Wildlife Fund) in 1961. He was responsible for designing their Panda logo [3], [4]. Sir Peter was also influential in a great many other conservational bodies. He travelled all over the world, starting officially in 1956, and in 1983 and 1985 published his travel diaries [5], [6]. These provide a stunning visual record of the places and the living things he saw around the world (it is one of these living things that we are interested in).

He created hundreds of stunning wildlife paintings, even providing illustrations for a Brooke Bond picture card series.(3).

(Editors Note: For readers outside the UK, I should explain that Brook Bond are a company who sell packaged tea and tea bags, and for many years they have given away collectors cards, similar to Bubblegum Cards, as an incentive for potential purchasers of their products. Many of these sets featured animals and plants, and were avidly collected by young naturalists during the 1960's and 1970's. Some of these sets of cards are now very collectible).

A special point of interest to Cryptozoologists is that Sir Peter was a firm believer in the Loch Ness Monster [7]. He made several graphic versions of what he believed the Loch Ness Monster looked like [8], and, in 1975, teamed up with Robert Rhines to name it *Nessiteras rhombopteryx* [9]. (Incidentally, also on a cryptozoological note, he believed that a large chameleon he kept at Slimbridge, informally referred to as 'The Oldeani Monster', represented a new species for which he suggested the name *Chamaeleo oldeanii* [5],). Scott achieved more than probably any other conservationist in history, and anyone who gains any enjoyment from the natural world should hold the greatest reverence for him. Sadly in 1990, the year after his 80th birthday, he died.

Less than two years ago, I began a private 'study' of whales and dolphins, basically to familiarise myself with their appearances in preparation for possible field sightings. Obtaining the available literature, and paying particular attention to how well illustrations matched available photographs, I learned morphologies, colours, markings and the respective names of the seventy six (or so) species.

Scott's renditions of things natural are works of great panache and accuracy. I adore his crisp, colourful style. As he painted creatures from the field as accurately as I can imagine, I chose a couple of books he wrote and illustrated so that I could examine his renditions of cetaceans, plus, in any case, I like looking at his paintings. Two books I found were the two volumes of *'Travel Diaries of a Naturalist'*. [3] [6].

In these volumes Scott records and illustrates a number of cetaceans he encountered on his voyages, and there, on page 254, was an illustration featuring a dolphin species completely unrecognisable to me - because, I hasten to add, the species was not one officially recognised! This animal then, is the subject of this article and it is my purpose here to attempt to identify it satisfactorily. Before we can begin to consider other possibilities, let us see what Scott himself had to say about it.

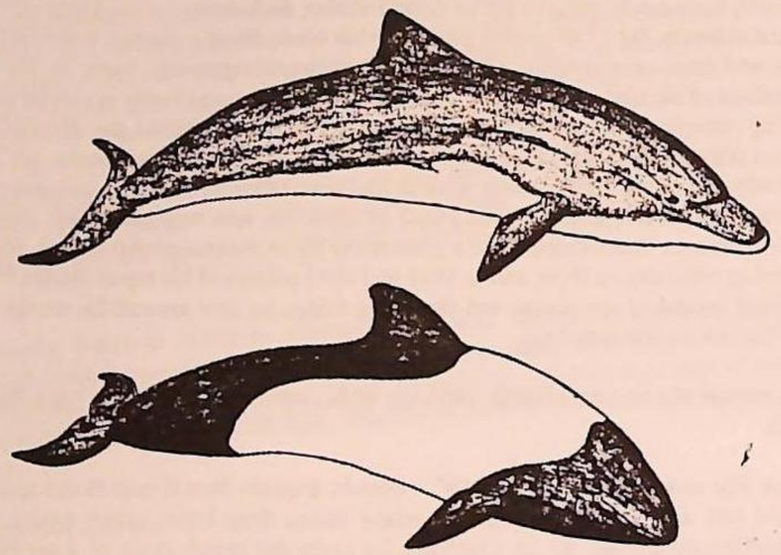

Fig. 1. The two dolphin species seen by Peter Scott in the Magellan Straits: the mysterious 'white bellied dolphin' (above) and the Piebald Dolphin. In the original painting, a second 'white belly' is illustrated behind the first and five more Piebalds can be seen further away still. Adult Piebalds measure between 1.3 and 1.7 metres: by comparing the two species in the painting we can see that the two 'white bellies' are not much bigger. (Illustration by the author after Scott [5].).

Scott's caption to the illustration reads:

'Two unidentified dolphins, possibly the White-bellied, (Cephalorhynchus albiventris), riding the Navarino's stern wave'.

Seen on the fourth of February 1968, they were actually amongst a largeool of Piebald dolphins *(C. commersoni)* [10]. - one of these being the other individual pictured in Fig.1 - and, whilst the Piebalds got quite some description in the narrative, the only mention of the 'mystery' dolphins in the text is *'...at one stage two of a different kind came in - rather brownish with white belly only'.*

PROCESSES OF ELIMINATION.

Before saying anything else about the 'mystery' dolphins ('M' from now on), I think that we must first consider the identity that Scott himself forwarded; that of the 'White-bellied dolphin'.

THE WHITE BELLIED DOLPHIN.

I ran into serious research problems at this point. Exactly what a 'white-bellied' dolphin is turned out to be quite a problem - this name had been used for at least five completely different dolphin species (amongst whom white bellies are common!). However, Scott narrowed down the particular type of 'white belly' he was talking about by assigning it the scientific name of *Cephalorhynchus albiventris.*

This name, created by either Perez Canto or Rudolph Philippi between 1893 and 1896 [11]. though, at the time, they thought that the animal belonged to the porpoise genus Phocaena), has since been sunk into that of the Chilean dolphin (C. eutropia), a species first named by Gray in 1846. Therefore, this species is the one that Scott thought he was dealing with. But, with only this cryptic illustration to bear him out, could he have been right in the identification?

'M' AS CHILEAN DOLPHIN.

Fig. Two is an illustration of the Chilean Dolphin. As is uniform throughout the four Cephalorhynchus species, its head is quite blunt and the beak is not sharply demarcated from the forehead. The dorsal fin *..."is very low, backward leaning and with a blunt apex"* [11]. It is a small dolphin, averaging 1.2 m and 45 kg, described as pure black (but with three white patches beneath the throat, behind the flippers and around the anus); confusingly, however, in 1972, Japanese cetologist Masharu Nishiwaki described it as 'generally grey'.

This description of colour is not consistent with other texts - indeed - some authors have elected to call it the 'Black Dolphin'! Anyhow, virtually nothing is known about this species. Except, of course, that it is found around the Chilean coast and, as far as is known, nowhere else.

sized whales [24] during this time of greatest success. Those that lived in the Pliocene were eaten by the 13 metre long giant shark *Carcharadon megalodon* (but that's another story!). *Mysticetes* today are mostly enormous filter feeders that sieve plankton and other small fare. To confuse matters, the unusual, and very mysterious Pygmy Right Whale *(Caperea marginata)* is only about five metres long, which is smaller than the biggest of the delphinoids we saw earlier. The Pygmy Right Whale has almost succesfully eluded science since its official recognition as a species in 1846. More about this in article six.

Pygmy right aside, baleen whales come in three definite groups. The strangely ugly Grey whale *(Eschrichtius robustus)*, once thought to be a direct descendant of the *cetotheres*, is typically regarded as occupying a family of its own. However, it may in fact be a recently evolved, very specialised rorqual (read on). The bulky, slow moving *balaenidae* or right whales - the whales hunted so extensively in the past - form the second family. They seem to have been the first group of living mysticetes to have appeared, and did so probably in the mid Oligocene [11]. Following balaenids, the group I call the Neobalaenida evolved, with the pygmy right wales appearing first. Finally, with the earliest known fossil species coming from the mid Miocene, there are the balaenopterids or rorquals, the real giants with lengths up to 31m and masses of 200 tonnes for the very biggest-the Blue Whale *(Balaenoptera musculus)*, biggest animal of all time. (Please note that some recently revealed sauropod dinosaurs may eventually win the 'largest vertebrate ever' title [25] [26]). Rorquals are either sleek and streamlined (at least five species) or stout and bulky (the Humpback being the only member of that second group).*(See fig. 6)*. Rorquals have traditionally been segregated into two sub-families on that basis [24]. Some new genetic evidence, however suggests that the rorqual family tree is in need of revision. As the issues here are coupled with interpretation of variation amongst some of the rorqual species, this area will get fuller discussion in article five.

There isn't exactly boggling diversity amongst the giants, unlike the smaller whales but perhaps surprisingly these whales are confusing in terms of variation amongst them: EXACTLY how many species are there? Which ones are definitely species? When we are that confused about such conspicuous and well known species as the Humpback and the Blue Whale then there is definite scope for an investigation into 'hidden' forms.

Cetacean systematics.

This brings me onto what is called systematics - a subject that does not just apply to the great mysticetes but to all of the smaller whales too. Within practically all species of whale there does seem to be at least some variation between populations. In the past, practically every one of these varieties was named as a separate species, so the modern count of seventy six species is in fact a very 'slimmed down' up to datecount. Whether or not a certain variety of a certain species is different enough from others of the species to be considered a species in its own right is a very contentious subject - for that reason exactly how many species there are depends on who you ask. Article five will be on this subject - it has a bearing on cryptozoology because there may be 'new' species out there currently unrecognised, maybe thought of as part of as part of another species due to lack of significant research and the right comparisons. The confusion that this issue and the others like it cause when we begin to look at whales in detail is considerable.

Hopefully, you may get to understand this in my next article; *"The Page 254 Story"*.

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colours used in depiction). Where either was deemed lifelike, it was rated "1", where not it was rated "0". 'True' life appearance of species concerned was based on comparison of various photos of species in life, with as little reference to other artists renditions as possible. For reasons of space, the table that resulted is not reproduced here, but what did the results indicate?

RESULTS OF ACCURACY 'ASSESSMENT'.

Of the twenty-three species illustrated by Scott (therefore eliciting forty-six separate accuracy assessments), only six of the assessments deserved a "0": none of the species illustrated were deemed inaccurate in both morphology AND pigmentation. Also, only two of the six inaccuracies were deemed 'major' (discussed below in 'What to conclude?'). By my criteria, therefore, Scott was practically 87% accurate in his cetacean renditions: a most illustrious achievement.

WHAT TO CONCLUDE?

However, in that this assessment provides overall judgement, it might be misleading in what it tells us about the validity of 'M'. Particularly telling in this regard are Scott's renditions of Hourglass dolphins *(Lagenorhynchus cruciger)* (see Fig. 3). These illustrations scored "1" on pigmentation, but "0" on morphology as can be seen by the more accurate Hourglass dolphin depicted below Scott's rendition. In this instance Scott was quite inaccurate. Despite his OVERALL excellence in the illustrations, Scott did make notable errors. The validity of 'M', must therefore, remain suspect.

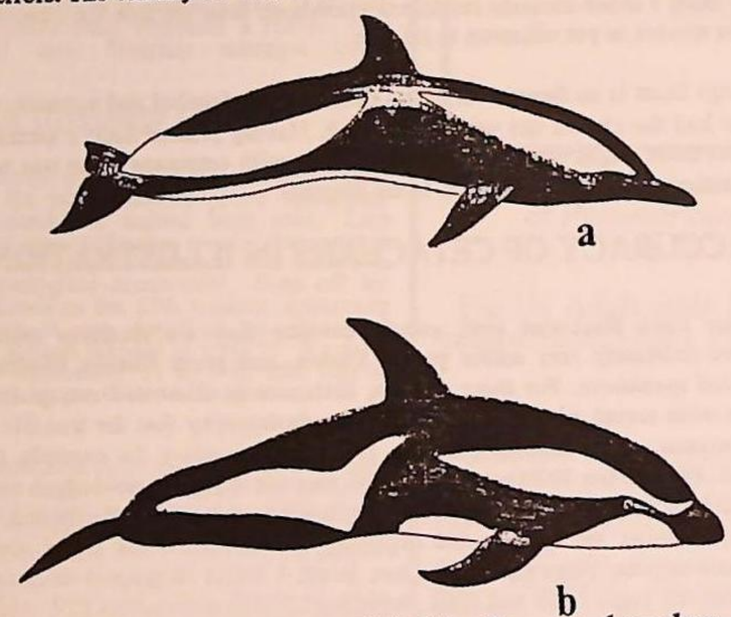

Fig. 3. 3a. An Hourglass dolphin *(Lagenorhynchus cruciger)* as painted by Scott in 1968. Compare this with 3b, an accurate rendition of the same species. (3a from [5], 3b after a photograph in [12]. Pictures by the author).

Other authors appear to have reached this conclusion and subsequently considered 'M' to represent inaccurately depicted Chilean dolphins (though no-one, to my knowledge, has considered the problem posed by 'M' in the depth presented here). For example, Jean-Pierre Sylvestre [9][14], in his entry on 'C', includes what sounds suspiciously like Scott's sighting. Others have remarked on recorded instances of Chilean and Piebald dolphins seen together, and I wonder if they were considering Scott's sighting when they wrote these remarks.

I am in two minds about this whole issue, given the dual nature of the evidence presented in this article. Ultimately, the only way of resolving the issue would be to interview those present with Sir Peter at the time of the sighting, sadly an option not available to me due to financial and time restraints. Until then, we are left with an open-ended mystery and a possible new species of the dolphin family left in limbo.

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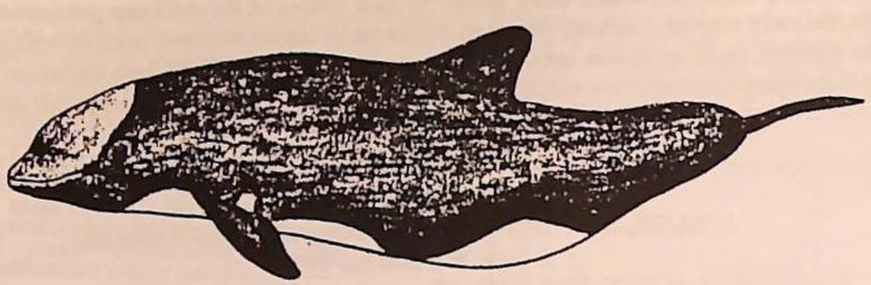

Fig. 2. The Chilean Dolphin *(Cephalorhynchus eutropia)*. This depiction is probably less than 90% accurate; all the illustrations I have seen feature markedly different animals! Furthermore, no good photos have yet been published. Picture by the author based on Ritchie [11], Camm [12], and Camm [13].

Given the known details of the Chilean dolphin ('C' from now on), I am not convinced that 'M' represents the same animal. Scott described, (and painted), 'M' as 'rather brownish'. 'C' is pure black. Whilst this may seem somewhat niggling, Scott recorded, (and painted), the black markings on the accompanying piebalds as simply 'black', yet 'C' and the piebalds are the same kind of black, and I would argue that the shade of blackness in the markings of the two cannot be distinguished in the field. Possibly, therefore, Scott was recording the definite hue of 'M', therefore proving it different from 'C'. Scott also gave 'M' white lower jaws, which do not occur in 'C', and an unbroken, white underside extending from the lower jaw to beneath the tailstock, which again does not occur in 'C'. Two other features, but this time of morphology rather than pigmentation, are not consistent with an identity of 'C' for 'M'.

First is the shape of the head which, in Scott's painting isnot comparable with that of any *Cephalorhynchus*, being long-beaked, fairly low and with a high degree of demarcation between beak and forehead. Scott illustrates the head of the Piebald Dolphin quite correctly and, if 'M' were really depicting 'C', then we would expect it to have almost exactly the same shape of head as do Scott's Piebalds. As it does not, my doubts are raised.

The second morphological feature is the dorsal fin. We have already seen how, in 'C' this is a low-lying, backward-pointing structure with a blunt apex, (described in ref. 13 as 'rounded'). 'M', however, has a moderately high, somewhat pointed dorsal fin that does not really compare to the previously given description.

THE BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN.

The Bottlenose *(Tursiops truncatus)*, was the only species (without other immediate non-qualifying features), that compared at all well with these morphological features. However, it can be eliminated as a candidate because, as far as I know, there have been no bottlenoses reported with bright, white undersides. (Actually, bottlenoses with white undersides are known, but the white grades up into the darker body colour - it is not sharply demarcated from it as in 'M'). Likewise, though the dorsal fin of 'M' resembles the tall, pointed fin of a bottlenose more than it does that of 'C', it is not really that much like a bottlenose fin, which always has a sickle-like curve. Also, the average length of a bottlenose is about 3m, which is more than twice the average length of 'M' (its length is suggested by comparison with the Piebalds in the illustration - they are abut 1.5 metres long and 'M' appears only slightly larger). Bottlenoses, I believe, can therefore definitely be eliminated as possible candidates for 'M'.

WAS SCOTT TOTALLY ACCURATE?

Up till now, I have been assuming one aspect without question and that is the degree of accuracy of Scott's painting. Clearly, 'M' does not match any known dolphin species in either morphology or pigmentation and this, in view of Scott's super-accurate renditions elsewhere, lean towards the conclusion that he saw and painted a dolphin species as yet unknown to science.

However, the paintings Scott is so famous for being meticulously detailed and accurate with are those of birds, the animals he had the closest ties with in his work. Having praised Scott's attention to detail and accuracy it seems that Scott might not have been as accurate with cetaceans as he was with birds. Could analysis of his illustrations provide any answers to the enigma?

ASSESSING ACCURACY OF CETACEANS IN ILLUSTRATIONS.

Cetaceans have never been illustrated well, mostly because they are creatures almost permanently submerged. Many are extremely rare and/or poorly known, and many famous illustrations are based entirely on dead, faded specimens. For these reasons, cetaceans as illustrated are, generally, dreadfully inaccurate. It is only with recent advances in underwater photography that the true life appearances of many species have become, or are becoming known. It is clear nowadays, for example, that rorquals are sleek and streamlined. Prior to the 1970's, however, this was not really acknowledged and rorquals were illustrated as heavy throated, chunky creatures. Scott, who illustrated during this period, therefore made the same forgivable errors as any other artist depicting a cetacean. Other errors are unique to the individual, and, as does anyone, Scott made these too. In all, I found 35 graphic renditions of cetaceans made by Scott between the years 1956 and 1968, depicting 23 different species ('M' not being included incidentally), and, in an attempt to assess the likelihood of 'M' being an inaccurate painting, classified all renditions in terms of their accuracy.

'Accuracy' is a very relative concept but was here determined on two simple factors: depiction of gross morphology (shape of body and extremities) and of pigmentation (distribution of colour on body, and